



## CASE REPORT

# Rib fractures in an adult male: Unusual presentation of a victim of domestic violence

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## Case report

A 46-year-old gentleman attended the emergency department with a history of blunt trauma to the right side of his chest allegedly from falling against a table the day prior to his attendance. He was complaining of shortness of breath and pain on the right side of his chest and a chest X-ray was performed to rule out a traumatic pneumothorax. The chest X-ray (Fig. 1) revealed several fractured ribs on the right side in three different stages of healing. There was a new/recent fracture in the right tenth rib posteriorly which possibly was from the injury sustained the day prior to his attendance. There was another fracture in the right eighth rib, which had started healing with callus formation, the age of which was estimated to be within 4–6 weeks. There were two other old healed fractures in the sixth and seventh ribs on the right side. On further questioning following the X-ray examination, regarding the mechanism of the injuries, the patient reluctantly admitted that he was being assaulted (punched and kicked) on a frequent basis by his female partner. The patient was not willing to involve the police or the social services.

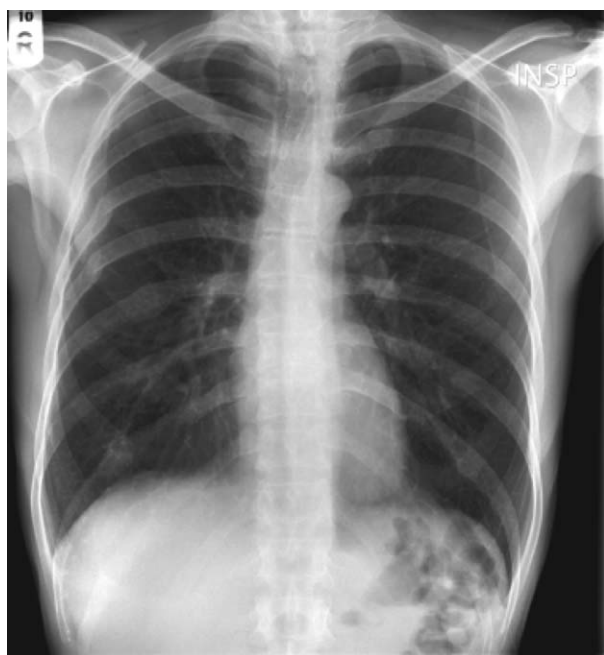
## Discussion

Domestic violence against men is much more common than it is perceived to be. There were an estimated 2.5 million incidents of domestic violence acts against men in England and Wales in 1 year according to the recent British crime survey report.<sup>4</sup> According to the survey 2% of men (in comparison to 4% of women) were subject to domestic violence in a period of 1 year prior to the interview. Among men who suffered domestic violence, 14% suffered a moderate physical injury and 1% suffered severe injuries. Ninety-four percent of men subject to domestic violence did not think that what happened to them was a crime. Female victims are six times as likely as men to report that they were subjected to domestic violence.<sup>5</sup> Statistics from a survey in Canada reveal identical rates of spousal violence for men and women.<sup>6</sup>

Rib fractures in children are due to high energy localised trauma and raise suspicions of non-accidental injury in the absence of an appropriate explanation of trauma.<sup>2</sup> A literature search did not reveal any reports of multiple rib fractures in adults as a presentation of domestic violence. Due to the variety of presentations, there is no fracture pattern considered pathognomonic of adult abuse.<sup>3</sup> As in the above cited case report, multiple fractures healing at different rates without an

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**Figure 1** Multiple rib fractures on the right side of the chest in different stages of healing.

appropriate explanation, even in an adult (men and women) should prompt a differential diagnosis of the individual being subject to frequent physical

abuse by his or her partner. While domestic violence advice leaflets for female victims are readily available in emergency departments, most emergency department staffs are unsure about the support available to male victims of domestic violence.

## References

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## Further reading

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